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ABSTRACT

For the generation of Americans who witnessed and perhaps even fought against the Hitler regime, the consequences of his political manipulation had a significant and tangible impact on their lives. For younger generations it is necessary to work to understand how Hitler constructed his appeals to the German people. While a great deal of his persuasiveness came from physical violence against political opposition, the persuasive power of his rhetoric should not be underestimated. To analyze Hitler's class appeals to the German people it is important to demonstrate how he adapted the basic tenets of fascist ideology to the Prussian heritage epitomized in the medieval Holy Roman Empire, the First Reich, and the Second Reich established by Bismarck in 1871. An examination of Hitler's appeals to the Prussian aristocracy known as the Junkers (powerful forces in the Prussian army as well as in civil government) shows that through his rhetoric, Hitler managed to intertwine the tenets of fascist ideology with Prussian ideals in such a way that National Socialism appeared to be the party of the aristocracy rather than the party of the worker. The primary tenets of the fascist ideology can be seen in Hitler's organic conceptualization of the state and the ordering of relations within it. Even today, the greatest danger for the citizen lies in the failure to recognize basic tenets of fascist ideology. (Eighteen references are appended.) (MS)

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Hitler's Appeals To The Junkers

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On July 19, 1988, following Jesse Jackson's address at the Democratic National Convention, Dan Rather asked Walter Cronkite why so many Americans disliked and distrusted Jackson. Cronkite replied:

> He [Jackson] is so powerful that perhaps he frightens some people with his power. We, some of us who are a little older. . . watched the rise of people who seemed to be speaking for the underprivileged, for a long period of time, and then when power came things went awry. I'm not suggesting in any way that Jesse Jackson would do that, but I'm saying that that image, I think, is still retained by one generation of Americans (CBS).

It shouldn't be too difficult to figure out that Cronkite was probably referring to the spectacular rise of Adolf Hitler. Without suggesting that Cronkite's comparison of Jackson to Hitler is valid, I do believe that it is important because it acknowledges the different perspectives from which older and younger Americans view Hitler's power.

For the generation of Americans who witnessed and perhaps even fought against the Hitler regime, the consequences of his political manipulation had a significant and tangible impact on their lives. It was in their lifetime that six million Jews were slaughtered in German concentration camps. It was in their lifetime that Hitler's domination of Europe threatened world

stability. It was their lives, or those of family and friends, that were jeopardized or lost in the camps of Auschwitz and Dachau and on the battle fields of Europe.

For younger generations, those of us born after World War II, Hitler must be viewed from a different perspective. We can only look at it backwards, through the holocaust. Some of us learned about him in history books. Much of our knowledge, I suspect, comes from television or film dramatizations about Hitler and Nazi Germany. To a society that professes to value individual liberties such as freedom of expression, equality of opportunity, and the right of all people to peacefully co-exist in spite of differences in nationality and race, the term "fascism" is synonymous with "evil." In theory "evil" should be easily recognizable. For a generation raised on television and movies it is almost as if we expect "evil" to be accompanied by the sound track from Jaws. I don't want to sell my generation short, but it is absolutely necessary that we work to understand how Hitler constructed his appeals to the German people. While a great deal of his persuasiveness came from physical violence against political opposition, we should not underestimate the persuasive power of his rhetoric. Hitler did not stage a coup in order to gain political power in Germany; he was given control legally under the German Constitution.

It is my purpose in this paper to analyze Hitler's class appeals to the German people as separate from his racial rhetoric. I do this not to undermine the significance of his anti-semitism but to demonstrate how he adapted the basic tenets

of fascist ideology to the Prussian heritage epitomized in the medieval Holy Roman Empire, the First Reich, and the Second Reich established by Bismarck in 1871. According to Shirer, "Both had added glory to the German name. The Weimar Republic, as Nazi Propaganda had it, had dragged that fair name in the mud. The Third Reich restored it, just as Hitler had promised. Hitler's Germany, then, was depicted as a logical development from all that had gone before--or at least of all that had been glorious" (Shirer, pp 133-134).

For the purpose of this presentation I will concentrate on Hitler's appeals to the Prussian aristocracy known as the Junkers. In his book, A History of Prussia, Koch notes that a Junker was "originally the son of a noble house in the middle ages often doing his military apprenticeship as the squire to a knight, in more modern armies also being a 'Fahnenjunker,' or ensign, the rank held prior to a full commission" (pp 46-47). Though the Junkers were known primarily as agrarian nobility on feudal estates east of the Elbe River, they became powerful forces in the Prussian army as well as in civil government.

Koch contends that the Junker control of the military began when Frederick William I compelled the nobility (the Junkers) to serve as officers in the Prussian Army by insisting on a type of "vassalage expressed in terms of service to the crown and state. In that way the Prussain Army proved to be a major institution through which in due course the aristocracy was integrated into and absorbed by the state" (p. 86). When the Treaty of Versailles limited the German Army to 100,000 long-term

volunteers in 1919, the force consisted almost entirely of officers of aristocratic birth and from old military families. The Reichwehr was, then, effectively controlled by the Junkers when Hitler became Chancellor in 1933 (Feuchtwanger, p.229).

The Junkers came to dominate Prussian civil government in much the same way. Even though they were nobility and considered to be efficient farmers, many of them were relatively poor and had to sustain their estates by seeking employment. The Junkers comprised a major segment of the German civil service through World War I (Muncy). Though their prominence in government diminished somewhat in the Weimar Republic, it reasserted itself in the brief administration formed under Franz von Papen in 1932 which was "as pure a reincarnation of the old monarchist aristocratic Junker governments of the imperial era as could be imagined" (Feuchtwanger, p. 226). After he was replaced as Chancellor by Kurt von Schleicher in December of 1932, it was Papen who conspired with the National Socialists to form the coalition government which made Adolf Hitler Chancellor of Germany in January of 1933.

In the decade following the end of World War II the finger of accusation was pointed at the Prussian Junker as the cause of Nazi atrocities. In <u>The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich</u>, Shirer argued that the Junker was epitomized by Otto von Bismarck who in 1870 united Germany into a single prussian state:

> Bismarck's unique creation is the Germany we have known in our time, a problem child of Europe and the world for nearly a century, a nation of gifted, vigorous people in which first this remarkable man and then Kaiser Willhelm II and finally Hitler, aided by a military caste and by many a strange intellectual,

> succeeded in inculcating a lust for power and domination, a passion for unbridled militarism, a contempt and a longing for authority, for authoritarianism (1950).

In 1945 Frederick Martin based his book The Junker Menace on the premise that:

> Germany's crimes against the world are the result of a peculiar mental and moral attitude, brought about by the Prussian Junkers. With their sinister character and their striving for power, they long held a firm grip upon the Prussian population through their control of army, bureaucracy and education. It will be shown how, under Bismarck's leadership, the whole German Reich came under Junker domination and how the middle classes were won over to share the Junker ideals of caste arrogance and aggressive violence, thus making the domination complete. Through Hitler, the Junkers have projected their mentality into the rest of the German people (ix-x).

If Shirer and Martin were correct then Hitler was nothing more than a tool in the quest for a Junker-based German hegemony. As such, he would have been nothing more than a puppet of the Prussian ruling class, espousing Junker ideals and operationalizing a Junker agenda. Historical evidence, however, does not bear this assumption out.

First, Hitler was not a member of the Junker class. Considering the elitism that was an inherent part of the Junker persona, it is difficult to believe that they would have chosen someone from outside their ranks to achieve the re-unification of Prussia. Second, Hitler had to work to gain support of the Junker-controlled Reichwehr before coming to power in 1933. On the morning Hitler was sworn in as Chancellor, he and Papen had their supporter General von Blomberg sworn in as the Minister of Defense expressly for the purpose of putting down any attempted coup by the Army (Shirer, 256-257). Third, Hitler's National

Socialist Worker's Party was ostensibly devoted to removing all class and caste distinctions within the Aryan race--something to which the Aristocratic Junker was opposed. "To me everyone is entirely equal. What interest do intellectuals have for me, the middle class, or the proletariat? I am interested only in the German people" (Hitler, Words p.106).

It is my contention that it was the Junkers who were manipulated by Hitler and not the other way around. Through his rhetoric, Hitler managed to intertwine the tenets of fascist ideology with Prussian ideals in such way that National Socialism appeared to be the party of the aristocracy rather than the party of the worker. By emphasizing the organic nature of the state, and basing hierarchical order on his theory of personality, Hitler magnified the ideals of Prussianism into Nazi fanaticism.

I

One of the defining characteristics of National Socialism was Hitler's conception of the state as an organic whole. "We, as Aryans, can conceive of the state only as the living organism of a nationality which not only assures the preservation of this nationality, but by the development of its spiritual and ideal abilities leads to the highest freedom" (Hitler, Mein Kampf p. 394). The importance of this organic conceptualization is that it asserts the primacy of the state over the individual and that it dictates a hierarchy for the ordering of relations within the state. According to Cohen the fascist view of society as a living, growing developing organism is a literal rather than a

metaphorical interpretation. " The fascist view of society is consciously and thoroughly organic. We view the body politic as an organism, not metaphorically, but literally. It is not simply that states are like organic units--they are organic units" (p. 126). As such the state is a life force in and of itself which must be sustained through its internal organs such as industry, politics, and education. Hitler's literal application of organicity to the Reich was manifest in several forms.

First, an organic state cannot tolerate any theory which asserts the existence of the individual outside of the state. A hand, for example, has no purpose and therefore no existence without a body. By the same token, the worker, who labored for the glorification of Germany and not for individual profit, could only exist within the hierarchy of the state. In the fascist doctrine of Mussolini, the subordination of the individual was the only manner in which true freedom could be achieved.

> For fascism the state is supreme, not alone because it makes possible coordinated rule, but because the state is the highest form of spiritual unity. Man is man only in so far as his existence is an individualized concrete of this universal spirit, the state. The state is a higher expression of personality through which man alone secures whatever freedom he possesses; man finds true spiritual expression as his interests are made one with the social will" (Anderson, p. 361).

Mussolini's articulation of the state as the highest form of spiritual unity made the state the only means of achieving freedom for individuals. Freedom, in this sense, was a standard of living characterized by order rather than anarchy. The individual had to surrender freedom in order to gain it. Hitler articulated this argument in citing excessive individualism as

one of the prime causes of anarchy:

> The prerequisite for the development of every community is and remains the surrender of the unlimited freedom of the individual in favor of binding duties and obligations owed to the whole. . . . The organization of larger communities demands, at the outset, the surrender of unbridled individual freedom. As a result, however, of the performance achieved by the whole and of the better security thus afforded to the whole, the individual is offered a higher and protected standard of living. . . . The organized grouping of individuals, however, by means of the limitation of the freedom of the individual in favor of the organization of a greater community leads to the state. Thus the sine qua non for the state, and the basis of the existence of the state, is and always will be the authority embodied in the will to the maintenance of the state (Hitler, Words p.44).

Because individual freedom ultimately leads to anarchy, it destroys the individual. For Hitler, then,the state was the only means of defining individual roles within the state. Each role gained its justification in perpetuating the will of the state. The next section of this paper will be concerned with how individual roles were defined through Hitler's theory of personality.

The importance of an organic theory of state takes on added significance when read against the Prussian/Junker conceptualization of the state. In 1919 Spengler argued that the very essence of Prussianism was its existence as a unified, homogenous whole. "Prussianism is a lifestyle, an instinct, a compulsion. . . . The officer Corps, the bureaucracy, the workers of August Bebel, "the" people of 1813, 1870, 1914, feel, desire, act as a super-personal whole. This is not herd instinct: it is something immensely strong and free, which no one who does not belong can understand. Prussianism is exclusive (Feutchtwanger,

p 9). The ability and desire to move as a unified whole implies a homogeneity that seldom exists in societies premised on the priority of the individual. In the United Stated, for example, the Bill of Rights exists to protect the individual from the power of the state. The implication is that the interest of the state and the individual are opposed to one another. For the Junker there was no difference between the will of the state and the will of the people. Feuchtwanger cites the Junker philosophy as the argument that: "The Prussian state rests on Mutual service. In the Prussian concept of the state there lives the voluntary subordination into a structure of which every individual is a necessary part. L'etat c'est moi is the motto of every Prussian" (Feuchtwanger, p. 229).

Much of the emphasis placed on the state throughout Hitler's reign stemmed, at least in part, from the Prussian desire for the reunification of the Reich. For most Prussians the term "Reich" signified more than just country or state, it was a sacred obsession to recover the lands lost to Napoleon in 1806. "Therefore, when the Holy Roman Empire expired as a political structure in 1806. . . and when the problem arose how to reconstitute Germany, the vision of the Reich never lost its potency" (Samuel, p. 61). The Second Reich under Bismarck was, for Germany, "a moment of national rejoicing. . . . The majority of German people saw in the foundation of the German Empire the fulfillment of their national wishes and of German history" (Koch, 270). It was Bismarck's Prussian empire which was to serve as both model and inspiration for the Third Reich.

Geographically, Prussia was composed of a shifting array of European regions which included Bavaria, Westphalia, Thuringia, and Prussia. The lands were not necessarily contiguous, nor was its composition stable. It was precisely this fragmentary, unstable nature that fed the obsession for a unified Reich. "Prussia, too, encompasses only fragments of the German people and German lands. But what lies at the very core of this state is its mission for the whole, of which it has continually absorbed ever greater parts. This mission is Prussia's raison d'etre and its strength. If Prussia were able to forget it, it would cease to be a necessity (Thadden, p.12). Hitler's quest was simply a new rendition of the old Prussian obsession. Nowhere was this more evident than at the opening of the Reichstag on March 22, 1933. Held at the Garrison Church and by the crypt of Frederick the Great, Hitler capitalized on the empire setting by swearing his allegiance to Prussian ideals.

> The place where we are assembled today admonishes us to look back to the Old Prussia, which in fear of God attained greatness through faithful labor, never failing courage and devoted patriotism, and on this foundation united the German tribes. May the old spirit of this glory--hallowed site--also imbue the present generation! May it free us from self-seeking and party squabbles and join us in national solidarity and spiritual regeneration for the benediction of a free and proud Germany united within itself (N.Y. Times, March 22, 1933).

It was the spirit of the Reich which allowed Hitler to capitalize on the Junker obsession with service to the state. This was a ideal manifest through their continued dominance in both the German army and in civil service. The organicity of the state and the glory of the Reich were not only defined by Hitler as

inherently Prussian, but were operationalized on Prussian principles as well. It was Hitler's theory of personality which justified individual roles within the Reich, and which strengthened his appeals to the German nobility.

II

In his opening address to the Reichstag, Hitler proclaimed his goal to be the creation of a community of German peoples:

> We will honestly strive to unite all of good-will, and we will render harmless those who would harm the nation. We want to fashion the peasants, burghers and workers of all classes and occupations into a genuine Commonwealth in which the different interests shall be equalized as the nation's future demands (N.Y. Times, March 22, 1933).

The equality that Hitler promised the German people was premised on the needs of the state. The welfare of the Reich was to be the primary factor in determining how the needs of each class was to be met. Because Hitler's German community was exclusively Aryan, any reference to equality or community in this section will refer specifically to members of the Aryan race. Within these confines, however, equality was neither a matter of being nor of opportunity, but one of accomplishment. All German citizens were equal in that they fulfilled roles necessary to the maintenance of the state, but unequal in terms of the positions they were capable of filling.

According to Cohen, one of the basic tenets of Fascist ideology rests of the basic inequality of humans. "Human beings are not equal. The inequality of humans is not merely our theory; it is plain indisputable fact. Human inequality is a

natural--and even more evident--than the inequality manifest in other species (p. 120). The premise here is that an organic state presupposes an internal hierarchy of functions. Just as the animal kingdom can be subdivided into phylum, class, order, etc, according to their levels of biological complexity, the individuals within the Reich were organized along a similar schema. "The realization that peoples are not equal transfers itself to the individual man within a national community, in the sense that men's minds cannot be equal, since here, too, the blood components, though equal in their broad outlines, are, in particular cases, subject to thousands of the finest differentiations" (Hitler, Mein Kampf p.442). The important thing was not that individuals or classes acquired power, but that they occupied their rightful place within the Reich.

For Hitler, equality was defined by achievement rather than being. It mattered not whether the work was accomplished in the fields, factories, or fortresses, the important criterion was the degree of accomplishment. In Mein Kampf, Hitler applied the standard of achievement to the peasant's manual labor: "It will, if necessary, even by education extending over centuries, have to break with the mischief of despising physical activity. On principle it will have to evaluate the individual man not according to the type of work he does but according to the form and quality of his achievement"(p. 433).

It was here that Hitler began to reconcile his quest for equality with the Prussian social caste. The peasant didn't stop being a peasant in order to achieve equality and the Junker was

not forced to abandon his noble rank. It was, in fact under the Hitler regime that the Junker saw his heritage celebrated. In 1933 The New York Times reported enthusiastic Junker support for Hitler's National Socialism and their cooperation in reviewing their Prussian bloodlines to assure the purity of their lineage. According to Prince Benthiem-Tecklenburg, leader for the Deutsche Adelsgenossenschaft (loosely translated the Association of German Nobility), the Junker saw National Socialism as the champion of the nobility: "Under the hammer blows of National Socialism a system has collapsed in which the German Nobility had no part. Now under the leadership of Adolf Hitler, a new German World is forming in which the nobility too will receive an opportunity for full development of its forces" (N.Y. Times November 5, 1933).

Hitler's ideal for fostering full achievement from all Aryan classes rested on his theory of personality. It was through this theory that he built his rhetorical standard of equality through inequality.

> A philosophy of life which endeavors to reject the democratic mass idea and give this earth to the best people--that is, the highest humanity--must logically obey the same aristocratic principle within this people and make sure that the leadership and the highest influence in this people fall to the best minds. Thus, it builds, not upon the ideal of majority, but upon the idea of personality (Mein Kampf p. 443).

Given the political situation in Germany at the time Hitler became Chancellor, it seems hardly remarkable that this theory of personality would appeal to the nobility more than a democratic or a socialist philosophy. The paradox in Hitler's theory of personality lies in the name of Hitler's political organization, The National Socialist Workers Party. He proclaimed himself to

be the from the ranks of the German worker and to champion their causes as Germany's causes: "I myself, to whom the people have given their trust and who have been called to be their leader, come from the people. All the millions of German workers know it is not a foreign dilettante or an international revolutionary apostle who is at the head of the Reich, but a German who has come from their own ranks" (Hitler, Words p. 47). How, then, did this champion of the worker manage to tap into the Prussian myth so that he befriended the aristocracy while championing the cause of the worker?

Again, the answer lies in Hitler's theory of personality which was based, in large measure, on the discipline instilled into the Prussian military regime. Hitler's theory of personality was what the Prussian Junker had believed and practiced all along. "The principle which made the Prussian Army in its time into the most wonderful instrument of the German people must someday, in a transferred sense, become the principle of the construction of our whole state conception: authority of every leader downward and responsibility upward" (Mein Kampf pp. 449-450 emphasis in the original). Shirer reported that the Prussian state was one developed on the principle of military obedience and discipline: "And the state, which was run with the efficiency and soullessness of a factory became all; the people were little more than cogs in the machinery. Individuals were taught not only by the kings and the drill sergeants but by the philosophers that their role in life was one of obedience, work, sacrifice, duty" (p. 137). Recalling that Junker dominance of

the Prussian Army resulted from a sacred obligation to service for the state, Hitler capitalized on the Junker respect for authority:

> Life in practical activity is founded on the importance of personality: but now gradually it is threatened by the supremacy of mere numbers. But in the State there is an organization--the army--which cannot in any way be democratized without surrendering its very existence. But if a Weltanschauung cannot be applied to every sphere of a people's life, that fact is sufficient proof of its weakness. In other words: the army can exist only if it maintains the absolutely undemocratic principle of unconditional authority proceeding downwards and absolute responsibility proceeding upwards, while, in contradistinction to this democracy means in practice complete dependence proceeding downwards and authority proceeding upwards (Hitler, Speeches pp.788-789).

Following this line of reasoning, democracy was unappealing to the nobility because authority resided with the masses rather than in the hands of natural leaders.

Hitler's comparison of hierarchy within the state to the military chain of command found its logical conclusion in the allegiance of the nobility to his supreme authority. More importantly, it worked to instill the Junker sense of duty into every German citizen. In Hitler's rhetoric the ideal citizen was one who responded unquestioningly to the demands of the state. "The individual soldier is not initiated into the thought processes of higher strategy either. he is, on the contrary, trained in rigid discipline and fanatical faith in the justice and power of his cause, and taught to stake his life for it without reservation; the same must occur with the individual adherent of a movement of great scope, great future, and the greatest will" (Mein Kampf, p. 456). The ideal citizen was the

Junker.

III

The primary tenets of the fascist ideology can be seen in Hitler's organic conceptualization of the state and the ordering of relations within it. The primary implications of this ideology are the homogeneity of its citizens and their submission to the will of the state. Up until this point I have concentrated on the arguments Hitler employed to unite the German peoples. By articulating and nationalizing the virtues of the Prussian Junker, Hitler was able build an image of the Reich as the great community of German peoples; a community that included all classes and occupations of German citizens. It is important to remember here that to include is always to exclude. In Hitler's Germany that exclusion took the form of concentration camps and mass slaughter. It is the ugliest example of rampant racism in human history.

I have excluded Hitler's philosophy of race from this analysis in order to focus on the subtler forces of fascist ideology. It has become very easy for Americans to label any archly conservative ideology as "fascist." Ronald Reagan and the extreme right wing of the Republican party, for example, have often been labeled as fascist for their efforts to curtail the scope of individual liberties guaranteed in the Bill of Rights. While their efforts are certainly not commendable, they are necessarily fascist. I am afraid that we, as a nation, have lost the ability to recognize and respond to the strains of fascist

ideology which may be articulated without racist appeals.

George Bush's current preoccupation with the Pledge of Allegiance is a prime example of fascist ideology. In mandating that children recite the pledge in school every morning, Bush and the Republican party are working to inculcate the idea of "Americanness" into each and every child. To be included in the great American community each child must faithfully swear his/her allegiance to the republic every single day. While lip service is paid to the contention that the pledge is voluntary, the implication is that the child who refuses to recite it cannot be defined as "American." It does not matter why a child refuses, only that he or she does. An issue that is innocently touted as patriotic becomes, in reality, nationalistic. The child is defined only through his/her relationship with the state. There is no room for degrees of allegiance. The child either pledges allegiance to the living state or doesn't. There is no place to question the actions or beliefs of the State; the child's allegiance is justified on the grounds of the state's existence.

The mandatory recitation of the pledge of Allegiance requires the same blind faith in the justice and power of the state as Hitler demanded of his German citizenry. In 1874 Nietzsche warned of the danger which resulted from the sublimation of human development to the power of the state:

> Everyone thinks that Germans may now rest on their moral and intellectual superiority. One seems to think that now it is time for something else, for the state. . . . This is an ignominious misunderstanding; there are seeds for the most glorious development of man. And these must perish for the sake of the state?. . . The only way to use the present kind of German Power correctly is to comprehend the tremendous <u>obligation</u>

> which lies in it. Any slackening of cultural tasks would turn this power into the most revolting tyranny (Kaufmann, p.48).

Perhaps the greatest danger lies in our failure to recognize basic tenets of the fascist ideology. Walter Cronkite compared Jesse Jackson to Hitler on the basis of Jackson's charisma, on his ability to evoke emotional responses from his audience. The greater danger, that of the definition of the individual by his or her allegiance to the state, is more subtle. If we substitute "America" for "Germany" in Nietzsche's passage, we are provided with an irrefutable mandate. The only way to use the present kind of American power correctly is to comprehend the tremendous obligation which lies in it. Any slackening of cultural tasks would turn this power into the most revolting tyranny.

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